

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: Richard Sheirer, Former Director, New York City Office of Emergency Management

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Participants - Non-Commission: Former OEM Director Richard Sheirer, Giuliani LLC Attorney, NYC Attorney

Participants - Commission: Sam Caspersen, George Delgrosso

This MFR is in first person, but it is not a transcript, and the diction and sentence structure are mine – not the interviewee’s, though of course the content is 100% accurate. When I actually am quoting the interviewee, I use quotation marks. I use brackets when adding in my thoughts, and use third person when doing so.

Career:

I began in public safety as fire dispatcher in 1967. I worked my way to being assistant commissioner in FDNY in 1992 and later became a deputy commissioner. I left the FDNY in joined the NYPD as Deputy Commissioner for Administration and Chief of Staff to Police Commissioner. Then I became OEM Director on February 17 2000, replacing Jerry Hauer. I left OEM in March of 2002.

Description of OEM’s Functions and Mission:

Prior to 1996 Office of Emergency Management (OEM) was a unit within police department which had “very good people; very small role.” When Safir became Fire Department commissioner [in 1993], he asked what we would want to change. I said we needed a more level playing field, with the OEM in mayor’s office, not in the Police Department. I also thought we needed a more aggressive OEM. Safir brought that to Mayor Giuliani, who looked it over, and established the Mayor’s office of OEM in 1996.

1. The first mission was to plan for unusual events in NYC. We had a large planning staff that dealt with infrastructure, amongst other things. We planned for everything from water-main breaks to how to evacuate up to 900,000 in a natural emergency.

2. Second mission was responding to actual incidents.

2A. OEM had field responders, who would respond to an actual incident and make sure that the incident commanders (who from other agencies, e.g., FDNY at a fire) would have the resources they needed to do their operational job. Most responders are from the Fire Department or Police Department, with a few exceptions. OEM's role would be to support incident commander, whoever that may be. When several agencies responded to the same incident, and there was conflict between the agencies, the OEM field responders present would act as an arbiter between agencies.

“OEM should be invisible, but there when needed.”

2B. EOC [which stands for emergency operations center] – probably the most technologically advanced facility I have seen in the business. During a major incident which would require multiple agencies to work together, each relevant agency would send a representative to our EOC in our office at 7 WTC. You had areas for infrastructure; health and human services; utilities; first responders; state emergency management; federal emergency management; private sector. We had different levels of activation, depending on nature of incident. Because its capabilities so robust, we also used it to do complete analysis and meetings.

3. Our third mission was simply to observe New York City and the rest of the world 24-7 through our Watch Command, and thus be able to sound the alert when an Incident was developing. Watch Command provided us with significant, constant surveillance ability – of all first responder radio frequencies, as well as video of NY Harbor and all traffic lights, as well as televisions constantly turned to news channels.

For example, there is a Syndromics Surveillance system in the watch command which monitors EMS calls (which describe symptoms, pertaining to that call) and all of this is fed into a computer system. Thus, the computer would know that in Queens on April 7 of last 5 years there have been an average of X upper nasal EMS calls. If there is an aberration from norm, you'll get a hit, which sounds an alert. For example, we minimized fatalities during the West Nile situation a few years back because the Syndromics Surveillance system caught unusual number of flu like symptoms. The alarm went off in the watch command, showing a problem, which we aggressively attacked by coordinating different agencies. We worked with correct agencies, including health and CDC and state entities, re West Nile. We got media involved to educate. We worked with private sector companies which did actual spraying "A good coordination effort."

Terrorism Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):

We had very well defined plans for WMD; we did a number of drills, e.g. the Ice Drill (Sarin). Then we had a Red-EX table top re intentional release on plague. Keep in mind that with biological incident, first responders are EMS and hospitals. We worked aggressively with CEOs of pharmaceuticals re biological terrorism.

Work Culture of OEM:

Yes, we had great technology at OEM, but we had good people who were competent and dedicated

Thoughts on OEM location at 7 WTC:

It is public record that I was not a fan of location, with proximity to WTC. My concerns based on '93 Attacks

OEM Back-up Site capabilities:

Very limited; we were working on a future site; we used the police department academy, to the extent we had any back-up. We had the bus, which not big in terms of getting 35 agencies in, but you can get 20 people in there. Terrific communications in bus, and could hook it up to hardwires phones.

Coordinating NYPD and FDNY:

Remember my background – both police and fire. I knew the players in each agency very well. OEM was not so much about being a referee; it was about assisting and supporting. We had a great relationship with FD and PD, and I had a great personal relationship with Bernard Kerik and Tommy Von Essen. Yes, there are knuckle-heads in each agency, but you can't allow an individual creating a problem to snow ball into a larger institutional problem.

Coordination with Port Authority:

Good relationship with Port Authority. I've always had a good relationship with them, as they owned airports and port, I got to know them well, and I knew and got along very well to Infante and Morone, who died on 9/11.

Thoughts on Jerry Hauer Op-Ed:

It is wrong to attack Bruno personally. When Bloomberg became Mayor, we were heavily engaged with Ground Zero and trying to find a new home. I believe blackout of 2003 and Odermatt's retirement gave Mayor the opportunity to take a look at OEM, which was not a priority of the mayor. Now Bruno is reporting directly to the Mayor, not to one of his assistants, and I think it will get OEM back on ground. I think there is a middle ground.

Intelligence info given pre 9/11:

If there was a specific issue of importance, the FBI on occasion would share that info. I had top secret clearance. Mostly I worked with NYPD on intelligence issues. We were working very closely leading up to millennium.

Day of 9/11:

I was at City Hall, and we heard the "pop". I thought it was a Con-Edison correspondent explosion. My office immediately called me and said a twin engine plane had gone into north tower. I walked outside and saw immediately and knew it was not a twin engine [knew it was something larger]. I proceeded to WTC. I came in on corner of Church and Vesey, walked into 5 WTC, down into concourse. In the concourse I tell a guy to evacuate, who is resisting. I tell a PA cop to make sure that he gets out. What struck me immediately was how calm and professional evacuation was – strong contrast to the screaming and panic of 1993.

Walked west through concourse, past the Path Station, into lobby of 1 WTC. There we started to do what OEM does. I knew from car ride communication that EOC already activated. EMS was going to set up triage in lobby. I told EMS to use atrium of 7 as triage center, because it's a great space, away from the scene, and very good access there for ambulances, and they won't be getting in way of fire and police. I told this to an EMS commander who did it. I spoke to Morone and Infante, senior Port Authority police brass. I spoke with Chief Callen, who was in charge of lobby command post for FDNY; I spoke with John O'Neil, who was Larry Silverstein's director of security [previously NYC FBI SAC]. I had radio communications with EOC; including a confirmation that hospital association was organizing for what was likely to be mass casualties

Radios:

Had OEM radio, which worked very well and allowing me to communicate with EOC.

Thoughts on what would transpire:

We all knew we were going to lose a lot of people at and above impact zone. But we didn't think we would lose the entire buildings.

Supporting FDNY and PA:

We told fire we could get them anything they needed. We worked with Port Authority as well.

WTC 2 Attacked:

Then there was the second explosion, which we originally thought was a jet fuel explosion in 1 WTC, but we learned very quickly that second tower hit. Now there was no question this is terrorism, I called Richie Rotanz at the EOC and told him to get on phone with SEMO [New York State Emergency Management Organization] to get air national guard. And I told him to get Pentagon and have them get us air support. Richie Rotanz told me there were other planes unaccounted for. I said in lobby that another plane was on the way. As an example of how we were grasping for straws, I instructed the Police Department aviation to not let another plane hit. But looking back, how could a helicopter stop a commercial jet going over 400 miles per hour?

The sound of jumpers was the worst sound I ever have heard.

I was trying to get the mayor, but cell phone communications were very, very difficult,

Then a police Lt. Don Henry, who on Mayor's detail, said City Hall was evacuated, and I used him to try to get in touch with mayor.

Riche ordered OEM to evacuate 7 WTC right after he told me of report of additional planes. This turned out to be a great call.

OEM bus at West Broadway and Barclay became our command post.

I heard that mayor is at 75 Barclay, and he wants me there. So I go there and brief the Mayor. While we're in 75 Barclay, 2 WTC comes down, though we didn't know at that time what had happened – just that something significant had occurred, and we needed to evacuate, because with the debris ball it was pitch black and we couldn't operate. We eventually get out on Church street, and discussed where to go. We decided that City Hall was too much of a target. We thought about 1 Police Plaza, but concern was that if we went there we would get in way of police's operations in rest of city in trying to cover all sensitive areas.

Then 1 WTC came down as we were walking north.

We thought about Tribeca Hotel as command post, but decide not to use it upon entering it, due to glass atrium [which could turn lobby into killing field if it shattered]

Civilians are still evacuating north, and I was very impressed by their calm and lack of panic.

We get to firehouse at 6th and Houston. The OEM bus is being moved up there, to give us support. Verizon was on the way to give us some hard lines. I believe the Mayor spoke to the Governor from there; National Guard was activated. We began to think about what agencies would have to be involved.

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But it was apparent this was not a good place for an ad hoc EOC, due to its space and other limitations, and we decided to move, and we go to Police Academy, and learn about Ganci and Feehan [senior members of FDNY who both died when north tower collapsed]. We were concerned that planes might have been loaded with chem./bio. So we started test for that at ground zero. Health Dept. executed that task.

Mayor was in control; he wanted to get in front of press to calm city.

In academy, we set up temp. OEM, still thinking we're going to get back into 7 WTC. The cooperation of private sector was amazing in that first week. No one ever asked how they would get paid – Verizon, ATT, utilities. SEMO and FEMA were there. The Mayor had an office. We had a conference room for meetings of senior officials.

We were rolling out government. FEMA Region 2 (26 Federal Plaza) had a presence. SEMO rep arrived from Long Island. Fortunately I had strengthened relationship between OEM and SEMO, which were poor when I took over.

We were getting all agencies involved, e.g., sanitation, thinking about identifying the deceased and how to do that; get hospitals ready, but we ended up be disappointed by low number of injured – not a good sign.

We got the pharmaceutical stockpile flown in to Stuart, and then drove down.

We had contention with USAR teams, who all wanted to be down there immediately. We didn't want to lose another life; so we were strict and cautious about putting people into the rubble pile and had them report to the Javits Center, not Ground Zero

A lot of my people were at 1 PP, and it was horrible to have OEM split up in two locations.

I went back down to the site that afternoon after initial press conference– well before 7 WTC collapsed. I walked around, checked out triage centers. I saw Dr. Kelly, EMS' chief medical officer. Construction workers were great. They all volunteered – by that afternoon. Dump truck

after dump truck arrived. They first staged at Canal, then at Javits Center. Heavy equipment was being staged at Canal Street.

“It was like a war zone down there.”

You hoped that people were still alive in voids, but 4, 5 and especially 6 were on fire. 7 also was cooking. There was fire in Battery Park City – a war zone.

I then went back up to police academy. Then back down to near WTC. I was still hopeful we could get back into 7 WTC. Then 7 WTC collapsed [just after 5 PM.] We go back to academy. We are advised by a doctor that there aren't going to be a lot of intact bodies recovered, that people in towers were pulverized.

The decision was made to go to Pier 92, which we had been preparing for a 9/12/01 terrorism drill. This was after Henry Jackson checked it out on evening of 9/11 for power capabilities. Wednesday they begin building this EOC, and we moved in on Friday afternoon.

Thoughts on FEMA:

They provided crucial support in weeks after 9/11

Had OEM been in a different location:

I don't believe it would have had any impact on first responder operations prior to collapse of second tower to collapse. The bus gave me the core operations I needed until we got together in academy, but I don't think loss of EOC really had impact on fire or police operations, because coordination of that was going on in field, not at EOC. And keep in mind that we had EOC long enough to make all necessary communications.

To agencies who would have to get involved.

After action reports:

Rich Rotanz had each OEM person give a narrative of his day of 9/11.